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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

Another long and hot week, but relatively less warmer than in past weeks, fortunately. Still, we had more 90+ days - about 20 or so this year, and we're just in the first week of August! My poor lawn, it's like looking at a closely-cut hayfield with a few patches of green mixed in!! I've tried watering it, but there's really not much hope to bring it back to where it should be without constant watering. And there's a partial water ban in my area, so the "water police" are out there issuing warnings to those who flaunt the rules. Well, that's what they say anyway!

We have a lot of interesting articles for you this week, so I hope that you manage to relax for awhile and enjoy them. For the slowest part of the year for news, we seemed to hit the jackpot this week.

Until next time...

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->A-ONE User Group Notes! - Meetings, Shows, and Info!
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ATARI COMPUTER ENTHUSIASTS OF COLUMBUS, OHIO
ACEC 2010 VINTAGE COMPUTER AND VIDEO GAME SWAP MEET

Saturday September 11th 2010
9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. EDT
Oakland Park Community Center
980 Lenore St.
Columbus, Ohio
Use E.N. Broadway or Cooke Rd. Exits; East

All vintage computing and game platforms, etc. and of course Atari!! are invited.

Free for all! (vendors and shoppers!) Vendors, please contact us to reserve tables.

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Any last minute update, maps, etc.:

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Another week has come and gone and things are looking at least a little brighter. I mean, it looks like the Gulf oil spill may finally be stopped for good, the weather here is taking a little break from hammering my neck of the woods (although there was another tornado warning the other day), and my respiratory infection seems to be a thing of the past.

Let's talk a little about the Gulf oil spill. I know that it's a good thing to have that puppy capped and plugged up, and from what I've heard, it's not likely that it'll "pop its top" and start spewing crude into the Gulf again, and that even though it's 'plugged with mud and cement' now, they're still going to finish drilling those two relief wells and 'kill' it that way too.

But what worries me is the crude that's already out there. We don't know how much there is and, I'm sorry, I don't believe anyone who says we've collected up three quarters of the oil that's been released, even if I DID vote for them. Even saying that it's been "collected or dispersed"... what the heck does that mean? Broken down? I don't think so. No doubt a lot of it has been collected, but I wouldn't be surprised if long-term studies show that the percentages are reversed. That there's still 76 percent of it out there, from the surface down to the ocean floor, that just sitting there like sludge.

Now, that happens a lot naturally. Sub-ocean oil fields poke through the ocean floor and goop things up a little all the time. There's a lot of oil under there. But we're talking about a huge amount, and the sheer area it might cover is staggering. Even if the crude did nothing but sit on the ocean floor, it's going to do a lot of harm. Tides and currents and storms like hurricanes can push things around, moving them from one area to another at Mother Nature's whim. Imagine a roving 'dead zone' in the Gulf, killing anything that lives on the ocean floor from the very depths of the Gulf right up to the shorelines of a dozen or so states and countries along the Gulf.

And that's not to mention the damage done by any of the junk that's sitting somewhere between the surface and the bottom, doing damage to schools of fish, turtles and the flora that they feed on. Creatures gulping the stuff down, thinking its jellyfish or a mass of something else edible.

And the methane.. Don't forget the methane. At the top of the water

column, I guess that most of that would 'pop' to the surface and evaporate, adding to global warming a bit, but not doing too much damage to living things in the water.

But what about the methane farther down where the cold and extreme pressure could cause it to form crystals and maybe just sit there. I haven't heard anything concrete about that yet, and I don't know if anyone knows how long it might just sit there or what it might do to combine with sea water. Remember the first "top kill" procedure they tried? They had to stop because there were 'hydrates' forming inside the pipeline to the surface. Well, that's the kind of things I wonder about "in the wild". Would it, could it form a roaming patch of poison for anything coming upon it? I wish someone either would or could (whichever the case may be) address that for us.

And dispersants. We know they're bad, just a little less bad than the oil.. so they say now. Do we know how long it'll take THOSE to break down? Do we know what the long term effects of those might be? I guess we're pretty sure that they're "somewhat toxic", but how about longer-term effects like birth defects in fish or crustaceans? How about the effect on sea birds' water repellent feathers? Will it break down or disperse the natural oils that allow them to just shake the water off? Will it affect animals or people who eat fish that've ingested it? I don't know if we know... yet. They used to think DDT and Thalidomide were good ideas too.

But there is one thing that bothers me more than any of that. More than the threat of the death of a large part of the Gulf, the loss of life and livelihood in the Gulf region, or the loss of several species of living things...

Have we learned anything from this? Is it evident to us that it's inherently unsafe in many ways to drill for oil that deep down? That there are risks that we're just not equipped to handle due to insufficient technology or the way things work under the pressure of a mile of cold sea water? Have we or will we learn that it's just not worth the risk to ourselves or our environment to get oil to burn so we can drive anywhere we choose to and charge our iPhones and watch our plasma TVs, or will we simply be content to "pay the price" and hope against hope that fortune really DOES favor the foolish?

There are, right now at this very moment, there are deep sea oil wells all over the world. In the North Sea, off the coasts of South America and Africa, and even more in the Gulf of Mexico. Some of them are even deeper than the BP well that has given us all this food for thought.

While it's true that technology may give us many answers, ways to prevent a catastrophe like this from occurring again, ways to stop it faster if it does, ways to clean up and reverse damage that does occur, I doubt it'll happen fast enough to save us from the next time.

Now, there are a handful of you out there... I can hear you murmuring in the back amongst yourselves... talking about "It only happened because things weren't done right and corners were cut", and that may well be true. But it's human nature to try to do things faster and cheaper. And although it does currently look like that's a big part of what happened in this case, can we be sure that it won't happen again even if all procedures are followed and everyone goes above and beyond and crosses every "T" and dots every "I"? Sometimes accidents happen regardless. Sometimes it's unavoidable.

What would have happened if this current procedure hadn't worked? If the oil "blew out" from another spot in the oil field? There was some speculation a while ago that there was another 'leak' not associated with the busted well head, that oil was gushing out of the ocean floor due to changing stresses within the field itself. Even when they got that "good seal" cap in place, the pressure was not what they expected and there were some "experts" wondering about that. What could be done if the ocean floor just opened up and let loose with the lion's share of the crude oil contained in the field? Do we know if we could stop that?

One of the things that concerns me most is that people tend to stick with what they know. We use petroleum and other fossil fuels like coal because we know how to burn them to get energy, we know how to get them (for the most part), how to process them, how to transport them.

What we DON'T know right now is how to get as much or more energy out of other sources. Solar, wind, geothermal, nuclear, fusion... all ways of generating energy to feed our ever-growing want. Not necessarily "need", mind you, but "want".

Solar is expensive and inefficient right now, it's true. It takes up a large area to collect, and it's hampered by the day/night cycle and weather conditions. Wind power is similarly hampered by weather conditions and the fact that the equipment is bulky and quite noisy. Geothermal is interesting, but not terribly efficient right now. Fusion power is still a pipe dream, and nuclear has some very toxic side effects and is quite expensive; according to one study, nuclear power ends up being more expensive than solar power when you weigh everything.

So we're left with a real conundrum. We can make do with less and/or more expensive energy, we can make someone else do without energy, we can put in the research to develop more efficient ways to get energy, or we can wait and hope that there's some "eureka moment" when the solution simply presents itself to us.

Me? I'm all for putting the time, money and effort into making solar energy more efficient and affordable, using wind turbines where we can, finding a way to make fusion work, and conserving what we can where we can. Let's get away from the things we know are dangerous at their very core: Burning fossil fuels, using radioactive material, etc.

Oh, I know it's much easier said than done, but that's exactly the reason we should put our time and effort into it. Imagine the subsidies that have been given to nuclear power plants having been given to researching ways to make solar power better instead. Where might we be now? Might we not have at least experimental satellites gathering energy from the sun and 'beaming' it down to us? Solar generators on rooftops and in some of the wide open spaces the earth has to offer? I don't know. And I guess we WON'T know until someone tries.

Perhaps those 40 billionaires who've pledged to give half their fortunes away should think about a concerted effort to find energy alternatives for all of us. Heck, if their research dollars came up with a way to make solar power even a little more efficient (since it's already more efficient than nuclear), it'd mean trillions of dollars in revenue (even in addition to the lost oil company revenues), in new industries, and in savings due to the lessening effects of burning fossil fuels. If I remember correctly, the money expected to be 'donated' was about 200 billion dollars. Imagine what research could be done with even ten percent of that!

Well, think about that. I'm going to leave you with that though until next week. Until then, keep your ears open so you'll hear what they're saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section    - Long-Awaited 'StarCraft II' Sparkles!
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                                       'The Sims' Goes Medieval!
                                       And much more!
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News    -   The Latest Gaming News!
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Long-Awaited 'StarCraft II' Sparkles

Twelve years is an eternity in the video-game business. In 1998, the Microsoft Xbox didn't even exist, and games for the top consoles - Sony's PlayStation and the Nintendo 64 - were still regarded as kids' stuff in comparison with the more demanding fare you could play on a PC.

Blizzard Entertainment's science-fiction strategy epic "StarCraft" was one of the highlights of that year, and fans have been craving a sequel for a long time. Blizzard, however, has been busy, most notably with its blockbuster online game "World of Warcraft."

At long last, though, "StarCraft II: Wings of Liberty" (\$59.99) has arrived, but Blizzard has made few concessions to the current marketplace. The sequel, again, is only available on the PC or Mac - never mind that consoles have gotten so much more powerful. And the core gameplay doesn't hold many surprises for folks who have been hooked on the original for a dozen years.

With a few exceptions, each of the levels in "StarCraft II" unfolds the same way. You land on a planet with a few buildings and a handful of robots. You gather the resources needed to erect more buildings, train troops and develop weapons. Then you pound the enemy with some good ol' shock-and-awe.

There are enough variations on this strategy to keep things interesting. You may be assigned to defend a landmark say, a giant laser from increasingly aggressive assaults. You may need to escort a group of civilians to escape ships. Or you may be asked to sabotage enemy trains before they abscond with valuable artifacts.

"StarCraft II" is described as "real-time strategy," meaning your enemies are in motion even when you're plotting your moves. I am not a big fan of the genre, so it's a considerable tribute to Blizzard's skill when I say I was thoroughly engaged throughout the 20 hours it took me to complete its solo campaign.

The plot revolves around the ongoing intergalactic war among the human Terrans, the insectoid Zerg and the technologically advanced Protoss. The human protagonist, Jim Raynor, is leading a guerrilla war against the Terran Dominion, which is led by a former comrade. Another old pal has been infected and transformed into the Queen of Blades, leader of the Zerg. Allegiances are constantly shifting, and there are suggestions that an even deadlier power is lying in wait.

The production values throughout are very high, with sharp, vivid animation and finely tuned controls. I did feel some disconnect between the precise, detailed missions and the melodramatic cut scenes that advance the story, but it's a solid tale with a few nifty twists.

"StarCraft II" tells the story just from the Terran perspective; future add-ons will tell the Zerg and Protoss sides. But if you want to play as one of those other races now, you can go online for head-to-head competition. The weapons available to the three races are well-balanced, and Blizzard's Battle.net does a pretty good job of setting up matches between equally skilled players.

Given its robust online play and its already announced expansions, it's clear that Blizzard expects "StarCraft II" to keep fans happy for a while. Perhaps not all the way to 2022, but we'll see. Three-and-a-half stars out of four.

Hands On with Civilization V

When developer Sid Meier released Civilization in 1991, could he have foreseen the phenomenon it would become? In the last 19 years, it's spawned three major revisions (in 1996, 2001, and 2005) and more than half a dozen spin-offs and expansions that have kept the addictive, empire-building franchise at the forefront of PC gamers' minds. But its story isn't through: The newest installment, Civilization V, is slated for release this fall, and publisher 2K Games gave us an early look at what will likely be one of 2010's central titles.

Longtime fans of the series will find much that's familiar. Pick a civilization and leader from a list of 18 ranging from Washington to Bismarck to Hiawatha, set a few basic game options, and you're off. Build cities, improvements (such as temples, barracks and universities, or powerful World Wonders), and military units that will defend them from invaders while you research the technologies you need to advance. If at the end of 6,000 years you've taken over the world (whether by conquest, culture, or science), you win.

But if the game's broader concepts have remained essentially unchanged for 19 years, the individual details have undergone considerable refinement and rethinking in Civilization V. Gone, for example, are issues of pollution and corruption; your food supply is the primary environmental issue with which you'll have to cope. Civilization IV's

complex religion system has also been removed entirely; temples are now strictly for adding culture and happiness.

Speaking of culture, it's now no longer used to expand your empire's borders, but to allow you to pursue Social Policies (the modern equivalent of Civilization IV's Civics). These are divided into eight categories, each of which contains five individual policies that can affect how rapidly you build improvements or units, or the rates at which you acquire culture, gold, or science. Because some policies have prerequisites and some categories can't be activated if you're already working within another category, how you'll progress through the policy tree becomes as important as how you climb the technology tree.

One of the game's most radical changes is the introduction of City-States. These are one-city quasi-civilizations that develop and progress alongside the bigger players on the world stage. You can ignore them (they won't bother you too much if you don't bother them); support and defend them, and share in their wealth; or conquer them and add their land to your own territory. The longer you explore the world, the more City-States you'll encounter and the more complex interactions with them will become. (City-States each have their own personalities, and frequently clash with each other and the bigger civilizations.) Management of City-States adds a fascinating new layer to the game play that you didn't always get with the previous games' Barbarian skirmishes.

Not that Barbarians have been removed from the game, you'll still have to find ways to deal with their encampments on land, their scouting vessels on the sea, and their constantly prowling around your cities. But a new battle mechanic makes it easier to dispatch with them (and marauding competing civilizations): Each city can bombard units within its sphere of influence, even on water, with no additional technology required. Of course, if Catherine the Great of Russia decides she wants your capital city, this puny one-per-turn bombardment won't stop her. (Trust us on this one.)

For that you'll need real military units, and Civilization V is packed with them. In addition to the series' stalwarts (warriors, triremes, bombers, and so on), each civilization can also construct special units that give them unique advantages on the battlefield. You'll have to learn how to use these to your advantage, but that's not all about combat that will require trial and error. Tiles on the game grid are now hexagons rather than squares (or diamonds), which will force you to pursue new strategies for addressing threats or being one of your own. Even more significantly, you're limited to one unit per tile, even within cities - the days of stacking dozens of military forces on a single square to gain their accumulative benefits are now over. This takes some getting used to, but it makes fights a lot busier and potentially more exciting. (Enhanced animation and 3D rendering, with DirectX 11 even available, do their share as well.)

The pre-release builds 2K gave us for evaluating the game were incomplete - multiplayer mode hadn't yet been implemented, and we didn't have access to any of the mod features. So we'll have a more complete, scored review of the full game when it's released later this fall. Until then, Civilization V looks like it could be a worthy entrant in the franchise. But we'd better go back to, uh, testing - just to make sure we're not overlooking any crucial details, of course.

'The Sims' Goes Medieval

The ever-popular "Sims" franchise is exploring new ground, and a new era, as it goes medieval. Positioned as the start of a new series, "The Sims Medieval" will be a quest-based game that offers players the chance to protect the kingdom from an evil wizard, craft legendary weapons, find the fountain of youth, compete in royal tournaments, and much more.

The game is designed to appeal to fans of both the strategy and role-playing genres. Players will be able to play any character in the land, from king to craftsman. Players can also customize their hero characters, including their traits and fatal flaws. The same is true of their kingdoms; at the start of each game players can choose whether they want to focus on the wellbeing of their subjects, on fame by choosing heroic quests, or on imperial domination through expansion.

No word yet on whether or not there will be any dragons to slay or maidens to rescue, but the Sims Medieval is expected to launch for PC and Mac in Spring 2011.

The Inmates Take Over in Batman: Arkham City in 2011

At last year's SpikeTV Video Game Awards, gaming fans, critics and journalists were wowed by a teaser trailer for a sequel to the popular "Batman: Arkham Asylum" game that itself wowed the industry after its 2009 release.

Beginning at the infamous Arkham Asylum for the Criminally Insane, a psych-hospital/lockup popularized in DC Comics' "Batman" line of books, the trailer eventually panned out to reveal Batman's Gotham City homebase all but overrun by the Asylum's inmates - all of the Dark Knight's greatest foes.

On Thursday, August 5, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment (WBIE) and DC Entertainment announced the title of the game, "Batman: Arkham City," due out for major consoles and PC in Fall 2011.

WBIE and developer Rocksteady Studios won fans and critics alike over with "Arkham Asylum" by faithfully adapting the most popular elements of Batman's current comic book series, and by leaning on a fan-favorite creative team, including writer Paul Dini (Detective Comics, Batman: Streets of Gotham, Batman: The Animated Series) and voice actors Kevin Conroy (Batman) and Mark Hamill (The Joker).

Dini is confirmed to return as writer on "Arkham City" but little else is known about the game. Game Informer, a popular video game magazine owned by retailer Gamestop, features the game on their September issue cover. The image reveals that Catwoman, a sometimes friend and sometimes foe of Batman, is likely to factor heavily in the new game.

Together with President Jim Wilson, Lapin is looking to largely bypass the shrinking multibillion-dollar business of selling video games at retail stores and instead to leap into the fast-growing but still small digital side of the business. In the next few months, Atari will roll

out a major online initiative with updated versions of old favorites such as Missile Command and Centipede that can be downloaded or played on social networks like Facebook.

It's also building out a licensing program that includes not just consumer products but also movies based on its classic games. Two are already in development at different studios.

"I look at us as basically a start-up, but one with a brand everybody in the world knows and a great library of intellectual property," Lapin said.

Atari's financial resources are certainly akin to those of many tech start-ups.

As of March 31, the company had \$13.4 million in cash and a \$57.4-million credit line, plus \$25.4 million in debt. Given that Atari doesn't have enough money at its disposal to make and market a major video game like Call of Duty, moving into digitally distributed games - which typically cost less than \$1 million to produce - is a strategy guided by necessity.

Atari's position nonetheless is an improvement from the \$7.7 million in cash it had a year ago. Infogrames-owned Atari had, over the previous decade, borrowed hundreds of millions of dollars to fund an acquisition spree, but was unable to effectively integrate its assets or maintain a healthy balance sheet. As losses mounted, it ended up having to sell development studios, intellectual property and its European distribution business.

"The company wasn't just being mismanaged, it was being abused," said Atari co-founder Nolan Bushnell, who recently joined the board of directors after a 32-year absence. "It ended up a shell."

Lapin first joined Atari's board in late 2007 and was elevated to the top spot last December, after the departure of high-profile executives from Electronic Arts Inc. and Sony Corp. who lasted little more than a year. Together with Wilson, he slashed costs, laid off employees and canceled projects. The pair also decided to move the headquarters of Infogrames - which last year officially changed its name to Atari - from Paris and New York to L.A., a hub for gaming talent. (Atari remains a publicly listed French company.)

Atari is not yet profitable, although it has almost stopped hemorrhaging money. In the most recent six-month period its operating loss narrowed to \$2.7 million from \$54.8 million a year earlier, while revenue fell 42% to \$61.6 million.

The company still has a development studio in France that's working on a racing game called Test Drive Unlimited 2. Northern California's Cryptic Studios, which Atari bought in 2008, operates multiplayer online games such as the recently released Star Trek Online and Champions Online, both of which have very small user bases compared with the market-dominating World of Warcraft.

But to drive much of its growth, the company hired a veteran Microsoft and Yahoo executive to head its online activities. Thom Kozik, executive vice president of online and mobile, has contracted with outside producers to make 15 to 20 updated versions of Atari games for the Web.

Though some of its games will be pay-to-download, Atari is embracing the increasingly popular free-to-play business model used by companies such

as Playdom, which was recently acquired by Walt Disney Co. in a deal worth up to \$763 million. Most players of so-called F2P games spend nothing, while a small but avid group pay for virtual items that enhance the experience.

"Over the next six months you're going to see some of our best brands coming out as casual online games and digital downloads across multiple platforms, and you'll see a handful of retail releases," Wilson said.

Atari also is aggressively licensing its original logo for a slew of items including bags, hoodies and wallpaper. Wilson, who is overseeing the effort, said the company is "staying out of the tchotchke business."

But, as well-known brands such as Playboy have learned, the strategy carries risks.

"Trying to sell retro Atari may say to people that you're consumed with your past and not focused on your future," said Helen Gould, a director of verbal identity for brand-consulting firm Interbrand.

Licensing throws off a small but stable source of revenue that Atari very much needs, however, and could let the company enjoy some riches from its intellectual property much like superhero giant Marvel Entertainment, acquired by Disney last year for \$4.3 billion.

International Creative Management, Atari's Hollywood agency, has set up Asteroids as a movie in development at Universal Pictures and Roller Coaster Tycoon at Sony Pictures Animation and is shopping other titles like Missile Command.

"We want Atari to be a company that's a part of the zeitgeist," said ICM President Chris Silbermann.

The tension between Atari's desire to profit from its past and its push to become relevant in the present is best captured in Bushnell, whose very presence denotes a desire by new leadership to connect with the company's glory days. The 67-year-old inventor said he spends two days a week on average consulting on upcoming online games such as Centipede and Asteroids but often finds himself regaling new employees with stories from the 1970s.

"We dominated this business from its dawning until the mid-'80s," said Bushnell, but "the wonderful thing about the video game business is that legacy positions are never set in stone."

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Federal regulators are abandoning efforts to negotiate a compromise on so-called "network neutrality" rules intended to ensure that phone and cable TV companies cannot discriminate against Internet traffic traveling over their broadband lines.

The announcement Thursday by the Federal Communications Commission ends weeks of FCC-brokered talks to try to reach an agreement on the thorny issue among a handful of big phone, cable and Internet companies. And it comes as two big companies that have been taking part in those talks - Verizon Communications Inc. and Google Inc. - attempt to hammer out their own separate proposal for how broadband providers should treat Internet traffic.

Verizon and Google expect to unveil their proposal within days and hope it will provide a framework for net neutrality legislation in Congress, said several people briefed on the negotiations between the companies. They spoke on condition of anonymity because the agreement is still not final.

But according to one person close to the FCC talks, the deal also undermined the discussions taking place at the FCC and progress that had been made toward an industry-wide compromise. This person said FCC officials fear that the proposal from Google and Verizon would not do enough to prevent phone and cable companies from using their control over broadband connections to become online gatekeepers. FCC Chairman Julius Genachowski wants to adopt rules to ensure that broadband subscribers could access all online content, applications, services and devices as long as they are legal.

"We have called off this round of stakeholder discussions," FCC Chief of Staff Edward Lazarus said in a statement. "It has been productive on several fronts, but has not generated a robust framework to preserve the openness and freedom of the Internet - one that drives innovation, investment, free speech, and consumer choice. All options remain on the table as we continue to seek broad input on this vital issue."

Network neutrality - or open Internet rules - are a centerpiece of the Obama administration's technology policy, but the issue has divided the technology and telecommunications industries.

Many big Internet companies and public interest groups say the rules are needed to prevent phone and cable operators from slowing or blocking Internet phone calls, online video and other Web services that compete with their core businesses. They also worry that without net neutrality protections, broadband providers could start charging extra for priority access over their lines - creating a two-tiered Internet that delivers better connections to online companies that can pay more. Google and online calling service Skype have led the push for strong net neutrality rules.

But the phone and cable companies - including Verizon, AT&T Inc. and Comcast Corp. - say they need flexibility to manage network traffic so that high-bandwidth applications don't hog capacity and slow down their systems. They also argue that after spending billions to upgrade their networks for broadband, they need to be able to earn a healthy return by offering premium services and warn that burdensome net neutrality rules would stifle future investments.

The person close to the FCC talks, who is also familiar with the Google and Verizon discussions, said the proposal being drafted by the companies would prohibit phone and cable operators from giving special

treatment to any online traffic flowing over the public Internet.

But it would allow broadband providers to charge extra to route traffic from premium services such as Internet gaming, Web video and online health care over dedicated systems. And it would not apply net neutrality rules to wireless networks, which have more bandwidth constraints than landline systems.

Those two details have alarmed many public interest groups, who are now accusing Google of selling out a cause that it once championed.

Josh Silver, founder and president of the group Free Press, said any deal that allows some Internet traffic to be prioritized over other traffic does not qualify as true network neutrality.

Still, public interest groups were pleased to see the FCC abandon its efforts to craft an industry-backed deal because they feared the result would not protect consumers and had involved primarily the large industry players.

For his part, Verizon Executive Vice President Tom Tauke said the company will continue to work with the FCC and Congress to establish a net neutrality framework that ensures "the Internet remains open . and investment remains robust."

At this point, it's unclear what the FCC's next step will be. Before it moves ahead with any network neutrality proposal, the agency must first establish its authority to regulate broadband in the aftermath of a federal appeals court ruling in April that cast doubt on its existing regulatory framework.

The FCC currently treats broadband as a lightly regulated "information service" and had argued that this approach gave it ample authority to mandate net neutrality. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia rejected this argument when it ruled that the FCC had overstepped its authority when it ordered Comcast to stop blocking its subscribers from using an online file-sharing service called BitTorrent to swap movies and other big files.

Genachowski has therefore proposed redefining broadband as a telecommunications service subject to "common carrier" obligations to treat all traffic equally. His plan has run into fierce resistance from the phone and cable companies, however.

New ID Theft Targets Kids' Social Security Numbers

The latest form of identity theft doesn't depend on stealing your Social Security number. Now thieves are targeting your kid's number long before the little one even has a bank account.

Hundreds of online businesses are using computers to find dormant Social Security numbers - usually those assigned to children who don't use them - then selling those numbers under another name to help people establish phony credit and run up huge debts they will never pay off.

Authorities say the scheme could pose a new threat to the nation's credit system. Because the numbers exist in a legal gray area, federal

investigators have not figured out a way to prosecute the people involved.

"If people are obtaining enough credit by fraud, we're back to another financial collapse," said Linda Marshall, an assistant U.S. attorney in Kansas City. "We tend to talk about it as the next wave."

The sellers get around the law by not referring to Social Security numbers. Instead, just as someone might pay for an escort service instead of a prostitute, they refer to CPNs - for credit profile, credit protection or credit privacy numbers.

Julia Jensen, an FBI agent in Kansas City, discovered the scheme while investigating a mortgage-fraud case. She has given presentations to lenders across the Kansas City area to show them how easy it is to create a false credit score using these numbers.

"The back door is wide open," she said. "We're trying to get lenders to understand the risks."

It's not clear how widespread the fraud is, mostly because the scheme is difficult to detect and practiced by fly-by-night businesses.

But the deception is emerging as millions of Americans watch their credit scores sink to new lows. Figures from April show that 25.5 percent of consumers - nearly 43.4 million people - now have a credit score of 599 or below, marking them as poor risks for lenders. They will have trouble getting credit cards, auto loans or mortgages under the tighter lending standards banks now use.

The scheme works like this:

Online companies use computers and publicly available information to find random Social Security numbers. The numbers are run through public databases to determine whether anyone is using them to obtain credit. If not, they are offered for sale for a few hundred to several thousand dollars.

Because the numbers often come from young children who have no money of their own, they carry no spending history and offer a chance to open a new, unblemished line of credit. People who buy the numbers can then quickly build their credit rating in a process called "piggybacking," which involves linking to someone else's credit file.

Many of the business selling the numbers promise to raise customers' credit scores to 700 or 800 within six months.

If they default on their payments, and the credit is withdrawn, the same people can simply buy another number and start the process again, causing a steep spiral of debt that could conceivably go on for years before creditors discover the fraud.

Jensen compared the businesses that sell the numbers to drug dealers.

"There's good stuff and bad stuff," she said. "Bad stuff is a dead person's Social Security number. High-quality is buying a number the service has checked to make sure no one else is using it."

Credit bureaus can quickly identify applications that use numbers taken from dead people by consulting the Social Security Administration's death index.

Social Security numbers follow a logical pattern that includes a person's age and where he or she lived when the number was issued. Because the system is somewhat predictable, sellers can make educated guesses and find unused numbers using trial and error.

A "clean" CPN is a number that has been validated as an active Social Security number and is not on file with the credit bureaus. The most likely source of such numbers are children and longtime prison inmates, experts said.

Robert Damosi, an analyst with Javelin Strategy & Research, said the crime can come back to hurt children when they get older and seek credit for the first time, only to discover their Social Security number has been used by someone else.

"Those are the numbers criminals want. They can use them several years without being detected," Damosi said. "There are not enough services that look at protecting the Social Security numbers or credit history of minors."

Since the mortgage meltdown of 2008, banks have tightened lending policies, but many credit decisions are still based solely on credit scores provided by FICO Inc. and the three major credit unions: Experian, TransUnion and Equifax.

Federal investigators say many businesses do not realize that a growing number of those credit scores are based on fraudulent information.

"Lenders don't understand that when they pay money to go through a service, they may be receiving false information," Jensen said. "They think when they order the information from credit bureaus, it must be true."

Without special scrutiny, credit profiles created with the scheme are not immediately distinguishable from other newly created, legitimate files.

Investigators say the businesses clearly know they are selling Social Security numbers, but it's difficult to prove. The sellers use complex disclaimers that disavow illegal activity and warn customers against using their numbers in place of Social Security numbers.

The businesses also instruct customers to provide false information when using the number to apply for credit. Customers are told to use their real name and date of birth, but to avoid listing any addresses or phone numbers they've used in the past. They're also told to avoid any other information that connects the new, clean credit profile with the old, damaged one.

Craig Watts, a spokesman for credit reporting agency FICO Inc., said FICO has tools available for businesses to protect themselves from this type of fraud, but they are not cheap. And many lenders are slow to adopt FICO's new formulas, which are updated every few years.

Some companies that sell the numbers have lavish, high-tech websites. Others run no-frills ads on sites like Craigslist.

Jim Buckmaster, president and CEO of the San Francisco-based Craigslist, recently told the AP in an e-mail that there were "fewer than 200"

classifieds on his site that used the word "CPN."

Within an hour of that e-mail exchange, dozens of the ads in cities such as Las Vegas, Los Angeles and New York had been pulled from the site. Many were reposted the next day.

An AP reporter called several of the sites, but got only recordings asking callers to leave a message with contact information.

Experts say the fraud will be difficult to stop because it's so easily concealed and targets such vulnerable people. Other than checking with the credit bureaus to see if there is a credit file associated with your child's Social Security number, spokesmen at FICO, the Social Security Administration and the FTC said there are no specific tools for safeguarding the number.

"This is an invisible crime, with invisible victims who don't have enough support out there to help them," said Linda Foley of the ID Theft Resource Center in San Diego.

Elite US Cyber Team Courts Hackers To Fight Terror

An elite US cyber team that has stealthily tracked Internet villains for more than a decade pulled back its cloak of secrecy to recruit hackers at a DefCon gathering.

Vigilant was described by its chief Chet Uber as a sort of cyber "A-Team" taking on terrorists, drug cartels, mobsters and other enemies on the Internet.

"We do things the government can't," Uber said on Sunday. "This was never supposed to have been a public thing."

Vigilant is an alliance of slightly more than 600 volunteers and its secret ranks reportedly include chiefs of technology at top firms and former high-ranking US cyber spies.

The group scours Internet traffic for clues about online attacks, terrorists, cartels and other targets rated as priorities by members of the democratically run private organization.

Vigilant also claimed to have "collection officers" in 22 countries that gather intelligence or coordinate networks in person.

"We go into bars, look for lists of bad actors, get tips from people..." Uber said.

"But, a significant amount of our intelligence comes from our monitoring the Internet. We are looking at everything on websites, and websites are public."

He was adamant that Vigilant stays within US law while being more technologically nimble than government agencies weighed down by bureaucracy and internal rivalries.

"Intelligence is a by-product of what our research is," Uber said. "Our research is into attacks, why they happen and how we can prevent them."

Vigilant shares seemingly significant findings with US spy agencies, and is so respected by leading members of the hacker community that Uber was invited to DefCon to recruit new talent.

Uber said that Vigilant came up from underground after 14 years of operation in a drive to be at "full capacity" by adding 1,750 "vetted volunteers" by the year 2012.

"We are good people not out to hurt anybody," Uber said. "Our one oath is to defend the US Constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic."

Anything that can be looked at legally on the Internet is fair game for Vigilant, with email and encrypted transactions such as online shopping off limits.

The holy grail for Vigilant is finding out who is behind cyber attacks. Inability to figure out who launches online assaults routinely leaves companies or governments without targets to fire back at.

"This is a completely unsolved problem," Uber said. "We've probably been working on it as long as the government has."

Vigilant has developed its own "obfuscation" network to view "bad actors" on the Internet without being noticed.

He told of uncovering evidence of fraud in the latest presidential election in Iran while testing a way for people to slip information out of countries with oppressive regimes.

The information obtained was given to US officials.

"They expected fraud but they didn't expect the wholesale fraud that we passed along," Uber said.

Vigilant's network claimed a role relaying Twitter messages sent by Iranian protestors in the aftermath of the election.

The group is bent on gathering intelligence by any legal means and then putting the pieces together to see bigger pictures.

"The wholesale tapping of the Internet around the world can't be done," Uber said. "We are looking at what people write, how people attack, how attacks happen...we don't care who that person is."

Uber is working on a mathematical model to spot when terrorist organizations are recruiting teenagers online. The group has 100 projects in the works.

"Our end goal is to provide software as a service to government agencies so we can get out of the business of intelligence," Uber said.

Along with technology savants, Vigilant is recruiting sociologists, psychologists, and people with other specialties.

The wall between "feds" and hackers has been crumbling at DefCon, which has become a forum for alliances between government crime fighters and civilians considered digital-age "ninjas."

FTC Says Computer Buyers Benefit from Intel Deal

The Federal Trade Commission is trumpeting its settlement with Intel Corp. as a victory for consumers who have overpaid for computer chips for a decade, though computer buyers shouldn't expect a sudden drop in prices.

The deal announced Wednesday represents the end to the harshest antitrust lawsuit Intel has faced yet from government regulators, and it imposes the strictest set of changes onto the way Intel does business.

But any changes as a result of the FTC's actions would likely be gradual, and possibly imperceptible, to most people.

One reason is that the prices for computer chips have steadily fallen anyway as technological advancements make it cheaper for companies such as Intel to make more powerful chips. Consumers have gotten used to getting more computer for less money every time they go shopping.

The FTC's case is built on the argument that those prices haven't fallen as fast as they could have. It has accused Intel of contributing to that by abusing its position as the No. 1 supplier of both central processing units (CPUs) and graphics processing units (GPUs) to box rivals out of the market and stifle competition.

CPUs are the "brains" of computers and are among their most expensive parts, often making up about 15 percent to 20 percent of a computer's price. GPUs are chips that make graphics look good on computer screens.

FTC Chairman Jon Leibowitz said Intel's behavior stepped well over the line - moving beyond "the type of aggressive competition on the merits that we all encourage and into the realm of unfair, deceptive and anticompetitive conduct."

Intel has long denied the charges and has pointed to the industry's falling prices as evidence that the market is functioning normally.

Its argument has supporters.

Last week, the "special master" appointed by a federal court in Delaware to oversee class-action lawsuits against Intel argued in Intel's favor that consumers have benefited from the controversial discounts that Intel gives computer makers. The reason? Those savings are often passed along.

Intel's general counsel, Doug Melamed, said the settlement "provides a framework that will allow us to continue to compete and to provide our customers the best possible products at the best prices." Melamed added that the settlement puts an end to the "expense and distraction" of the litigation.

Investors appeared unmoved by the FTC settlement, which was expected. Shares fell just 2 cents to close Wednesday at \$20.73.

"I think it's more of a formality than anything else and don't think it materially changes the game for anybody," said Patrick Wang, a semiconductor analyst with Wedbush Securities. A settlement that didn't have any major surprises "was never going to impact the stocks. If anything, it's a relief."

The settlement is a reminder that Wall Street cares less about Intel's antitrust tussles than it does the company's vulnerability to swings in the economy and changes in demand for computers.

Over the past five years, shares of Intel, a component of the Dow Jones Industrial Average, have mostly traded in the \$20 to \$25 range, except for the clobbering they took during the worst of the recession, when demand for the most expensive types of personal computers - and Intel's most expensive chips - nosedived.

As part of the deal, Intel has agreed not to pay computer makers for avoiding rivals' chips or retaliate against them when they do pick competing products - things Intel has long maintained it wasn't doing anyway.

Those were essentially the terms of a \$1.25 billion settlement Intel struck last year with Advanced Micro Devices Inc., a key rival whose complaints piqued regulators' interest. The aftershocks of AMD's campaign still reverberate: Intel is still contesting a \$1.45 billion antitrust fine in Europe and separate cases in South Korea and New York state.

The FTC deal goes further than previous cases in mandating that Intel needs to be friendly to its rivals in other significant ways.

Those include modifying its intellectual-property agreements with AMD, Nvidia Corp. and Via Technologies Inc. so that those chip-makers can more easily do mergers and joint ventures with other companies without the immediate threat of a lawsuit from Intel.

That is important because AMD's recent decision to spin off its factories into a separate company - which AMD needed to avert financial ruin - triggered a showdown with Intel over the legality of that move. Intel's leverage over AMD in that matter was key to wringing a settlement out of AMD for far less money than AMD could have won at trial.

Jim McGregor, a semiconductor analyst with market researcher In-Stat, said technology companies have long used such agreements as weapons.

"We've seen that over and over again where they've used that as a hammer," he said. The FTC's case is a "huge statement to the industry that, 'You're reaching too far.'"

McGregor added that chip prices typically fall about 20 percent per year, and chip-makers try to counteract that by rolling out newer products that command higher prices. He said the FTC is "reaching a bit" with its argument that consumers would see better prices as a result of the settlement, adding that "we've seen dramatic decreases in prices over the past decade."

Other parts of the settlement:

- * Intel must now tell customers that its "compilers" - which are used in software development - aren't in fact objective and are biased toward Intel's chips. Software written using them performs better on Intel's products than on rivals'. Intel has to reimburse customers up to a total of \$10 million if they feel they were misled and want to fix their software.

* Intel has agreed to maintain a key type of technology in its chips, called a PCI Express bus, in a way that won't degrade the performance of other types of chips that connect to Intel's chips. That part of the settlement speaks to the growing animosity between Intel and makers of graphics chips. GPUs are increasingly taking over chores that CPUs have traditionally handled.

"The FTC is trying to spell out the rules of engagement for the high-tech industry," McGregor said. "This is kind of a warning shot: 'You guys have to play nice.'"

Prepare for Record Patch Tuesday

Next Tuesday Microsoft will unleash 14 new security bulletins, addressing a record-tying 34 vulnerabilities. In the wake of the out-of-band patch issued for the Windows shortcut security flaw, and with an upcoming out-of-band patch from Adobe as well - IT admins need to a plan of action for implementing the deluge of updates.

Issuing 14 security bulletins in one month is a new one, but the record of patching 34 different flaws is not so uncommon any more. This is the third or fourth time that has occurred in just the past year. Microsoft has experienced a feast or famine flow of updates with virtually no security bulletins one month, followed by a massive batch of security bulletins the next. Microsoft has also had an unusual number of out-of-band patches this year to address attacks against zero-day vulnerabilities.

Wolfgang Kandek, CTO of Qualys, provides a brief analysis of the upcoming Microsoft patches on his blog. "Including the LNK update, 9 bulletins have a rating of critical and affect all version of the Windows OS, Internet Explorer, Silverlight and Microsoft Office."

However, Kandek goes on to clarify that "Windows 7 and 2008 R2 have a smaller number of critical vulnerabilities than Windows XP and 2003 in function of their improved security architecture, but are still affected by 2 critical vulnerabilities each."

Month after month of Microsoft security bulletins continue to illustrate one very crucial fact - Windows 7 (and Windows Vista) are far superior to Windows XP when it comes to security and stability. Windows 7 just passed Windows Vista in market share, but the two combined still only have half the audience of the archaic - and insecure - Windows XP.

For the organizations out there that are still using Windows XP - hopefully they have at least updated it to SP3. As of last month, Microsoft is no longer providing updates or support for Windows XP SP2 or Windows 2000.

Qualys' Kandek stresses "Windows XP SP2 users do not have any patches supplied to them, even though the 5 critical vulnerabilities for XP SP3 most likely apply to their discontinued version of the OS as well. Windows XP SP2 users should upgrade to SP3 as quickly as possible."

No OS is perfect - and Windows 7 is no exception - but Windows 7 has significantly fewer critical vulnerabilities. With a more secure OS, IT admins don't have less to be concerned with, and less cause for urgency to assess and implement the patches once they are released.

Regardless of what version of Windows your company employs - IT admins consider yourselves warned. It's going to be a busy week next week.

Trusteer Finds 100,000 UK Computers Infected With Zeus

At least 100,000 computers in the U.K. are infected with the Zeus malware, an advanced piece of spying software that is regularly defeating most antivirus software suites, according to security vendor Trusteer.

Researchers at Trusteer managed to analyze a server used to collect details from the hacked PCs, which likely became infected by visiting Web sites engineered to attack computers and install Zeus, said Mickey Boodaei, Trusteer's CEO.

What they found was startling. Zeus is designed to monitor computers and collect information, but the operators of this group of infected computers have taken data collection to a higher level.

For these hacked computers, Zeus was recording all traffic sent through a browser, including that transmitted using SSL (Secure Sockets Layer), a method used to encrypt sensitive data between two points. Boodaei said Zeus grabs the information before it has been encrypted or just after it has been decrypted.

"Anything the user sees from the browser or anything they type in the browser is being captured by the malware," Boodaei said.

All of the data captured by Zeus is sent to a remote database, which the Trusteer researchers were able to access. They found that the command-and-control software for Zeus is capable of doing keyword searches in that database, Boodaei said.

Since Zeus can see any data in the browser, it means that the cybercriminals know exactly when a person last accessed their bank account and the account balance without even needing to log into the account.

The Zeus database also holds a lot of other information, such as company e-mail, log-ins for social networking sites and financial credentials, Boodaei said.

Boodaei said the Metropolitan police have been alerted about Trusteer's findings. Trusteer will share gigabytes of data it has collected with the police in addition with the banks whose customers have been compromised, he said.

Zeus has been so successful due to the high number of variants that have been modified to evade security software. At any one point, Boodaei said that most antivirus software suites only detect Zeus about 10 percent of the time.

"The reason is that Zeus is so sophisticated it keeps changing its behavior," Boodaei said.

That's also a problem for Trusteer, which makes a widely used product

called Rapport, which many U.K. banks have distributed to their customers for free. Rapport is designed to harden browsers against malware and lock out malware trying to interfere with data exchanged between, for example, a bank and a customer.

Malware will often try to disable security software. Trusteer's Rapport will alert a bank if it is uninstalled. At that point, the bank could forbid the customer in question from performing transactions or tell them their computer is apparently infected. Trusteer is soon adding a component that will allow it to detect and remove certain types of malware from an infected computer.

Microsoft's Office for Apple Computers Due in October

Microsoft Corp said on Monday that it would release the updated version of its lucrative Office software package for Apple Inc. computers in late October, with a starting price of \$119.

The world's largest software company's "Office for Mac 2011" software suite, which includes popular applications Word, Excel, Outlook and PowerPoint, is targeted at business users and is one of the main products sold for its rival's line of personal computers.

Microsoft's business division, which averages around \$2.8 billion profit per quarter, gets 90 percent of its overall sales from Office, which is a staple on corporate computers.

The company said that customers who buy the version of Office for Mac currently in stores can upgrade to Office 2011 at no additional cost.

Gmail Users Can Now Sign In To Multiple Accounts

If you have more than one Gmail account, you may be growing weary of signing out of one to sign into another. Google has fixed that annoying issue with a new feature that lets you sign into multiple Google accounts from the same browser.

Google started testing the feature in July, and it officially rolled out on Tuesday. Multiple sign-in works for Gmail, Google Calendar, Google Reader, Google Sites, Google Voice, App Engine, and Google Code.

Google's main motivation may be driving business-user adoption of Google Apps. What does this mean for Google users? Multiple sign-in lets you open Gmail in multiple tabs, log in using different accounts, and read the messages from all your accounts without opening another browser.

"This allows various Google products to be used for different purposes. For example, it adds convenience and, to some degree, improved security if I use Gmail or Google Calendar for personal and business purposes," said Greg Sterling, principal analyst at Sterling Market Intelligence.

"Those can now can be managed by the multiple sign-in option on the same browser. I don't have to use multiple browser windows or keep signing in and out of Google to access different accounts for different purposes."

Google users need to opt in to begin using the multiple sign-in service on the Google accounts page. In the personal-settings area, users will see an option for "Multiple sign-in" that is set to Off by default. Users can activate the new feature by clicking on the Change link. Once enabled, a drop-down menu appears next to the e-mail address at the top of the page so users can switch to a new account quickly.

"If you use multiple sign-in, the first account you sign in to will be your default account," Google explains in its Help Center. "If you visit other Google products that don't support multiple accounts after you've signed in, you will automatically sign in to your default account for that product. If you sign out of any Google product while signed in to any account, you will be signed out of all your Google accounts at once."

Why did Google wait so long to implement what seems to be an obvious benefit for its users? Perhaps because it's not perfectly clean on the back end. Google disclosed some known issues related to multiple sign-in. Some of these issues may have slowed Microsoft and Yahoo from offering the service first.

For example, the multiple sign-in feature is not available on mobile devices. That's not a major drawback, but the fact that Google's Calendar gadget doesn't work properly in Gmail could deter some heavy Google Calendar users from opting for the multiple sign-in feature. Likewise, users who opt for the new feature can no longer use offline Gmail and offline Google Calendar, and the "not in Reader" bookmarklet only works for the default account.

Windows 7 Surpasses Vista, But XP Still Dominates

Windows 7 in July surpassed its predecessor Vista in global usage share, but the older XP continued to dominate by a wide margin, an analysis firm says. At the end of last month, Windows 7 had a 14.46% share, while Vista fell to 14.34 percent, according to NetApplications. When Microsoft released Windows 7 to retail in October 2009, Vista had an 18.83 percent share.

While Windows 7 sales have been strong, the older XP remained king, accounting for 61.87 percent of the worldwide usage market at the end of July, or more than double the share of Vista and 7 combined, the firm said.

Windows 7 sales were a major contributor to Microsoft's 48 percent increase in profits year to year in the fourth fiscal quarter that ended June 30. Revenue in the quarter rose 22 percent as business increased spending on replacement PCs running the latest OS. Sales of Office 2010, the latest version of Microsoft's productivity suite, were also a key profit driver.

Unlike Vista, which was generally panned by businesses, Windows 7 is seen as offering a number of improvements, including built-in support for touch-screen applications, a lighter footprint and less intrusive security measures than Vista. In March, Microsoft reported selling 90 million copies of Windows since its release, making the software the fastest selling OS in the history of the PC industry.

Nevertheless, interests in XP remain strong. In July, Microsoft said

businesses buying PCs with Windows 7 Professional and Ultimate preinstalled would have the right to downgrade to XP throughout the life of Windows 7. The company had previously said that option would expire with the release Windows 7 SP1 last month. Meanwhile, Apple's Mac OS X remained small player in global usage. As of the end of July Mac OS X 10.6 had a 2.48 percent share and Mac OS X 10.5 a 1.82 percent share, according to NetApplications.

Wikipedia Refuses FBI Order to Remove Seal From Site

The Federal Bureau of Investigation last month ordered Wikipedia to remove the official FBI seal from its Web site or face legal action.

Wikipedia is not authorized to use the FBI seal, but it appears on the Wikipedia entries for the FBI and the Seal of the FBI.

The seal is used to authenticate correspondence and actions from the agency and those wanting to use the seal must get permission from the FBI before doing so, David Larson, deputy general counsel for the FBI, wrote in a July 22 letter to Wikipedia that was posted online by The New York Times.

"The inclusion of a high-quality graphic of the FBI seal on Wikipedia is particularly problematic, because it facilitates both deliberate and unwitting violations of these restrictions by Wikipedia users," Larson wrote.

The Wikipedia page for the FBI seal notes that unauthorized use is subject to criminal prosecution, Larson noted.

Larson ordered Wikipedia to remove the seals from the site within two weeks. "Failure to comply may result in further legal action."

In a July 30 response, Mike Godwin, general counsel for the Wikimedia Foundation, said the FBI's request was idiosyncratic and incorrect.

"I hope you will agree that the adjective 'problematic,' even if it were truly applicable here, is not semantically identical to 'unlawful,'" Godwin wrote. "Even if it could be proved that someone, somewhere, found a way to use a Wikipedia article illustration to facilitate a fraudulent representation, that would not render the illustration itself unlawful under the statute."

The rules governing the use of the seal are intended to protect against "intent to deceive" or an "assertion of authority," Godwin wrote. Including the seal on Wikipedia does not do either, he said.

Godwin accused the FBI of providing Wikipedia with a version of the rules - known as Section 701 - that omitted certain words to fit its argument. The full Section 701 rules bans the manufacturing, sale, or possession of a "badge, identification card, or other insignia" from a U.S. government agency. The FBI deleted "badge" and "identification card" in its letter, Godwin said.

"Badges and identification cards are physical manifestations that may be used by a possessor to invoke the authority of the federal government. An encyclopedia article is not," Godwin wrote. "The use of the image on Wikipedia is not for the purpose of deception or falsely to represent

anyone as an agent of the federal government."

As a result, "we are compelled as a matter of law and principle to deny your demand for removal of the FBI Seal from Wikipedia and Wikimedia Commons," he concluded.

Godwin said Wikipedia is "prepared to argue our view in court."

Section 701 says that violations could include a fine or up to six months in jail.

Rise of the 'Cyberchondriac'

Do you have a rash between your clavicles? A bump where there shouldn't be? Dry mouth, itchy throat, dandruff? If so, you may have looked online for the answer.

That's the conclusion of a new Harris Poll released this week, which found that more and more connected Americans are looking online for the answers to health-related questions: roughly 88 percent of all Americans who go online.

In raw numbers, over 175 million Americans viewed health information online, up from 154 million last year and 50 million American adults in 1998.

The pollster surveyed 1,066 Americans between July 13 and 18, discovering that 81 percent of Americans have looked for health information online in the last month, with 17 percent doing it more than ten times. These "cyberchondriacs," Harris found, are evidence that more and more Americans are looking online for health information. But a CNN report also suggests that it can be taken to extremes.

Harris also found that these health nuts are finding what they're looking for: only 9 percent say they haven't found the answers they seek, and only 8 percent said they considered the information that they did find unreliable.

About 51 percent said they went hunting for health info online as a result of a suggestion by their doctors, and 53 percent said that they discussed their findings with their physician.

Games Defeat E-mail as Online Time Eaters

For the first time, games have overtaken e-mail as Americans' No. 2 online time killer, according to new research from the Nielsen Co.

But not surprisingly, blogs and social networks - Facebook, mostly - are still what Americans spend the biggest chunk of their online time scouring.

Of the nearly 24 hours of time that Americans on average spent online during the month of June, 23 percent was on social networks and blogs, Nielsen found. That is up from 16 percent in the same month a year earlier.

By far the most visited social network was Facebook, which recently celebrated reaching half a billion active users worldwide. The site commanded 85 percent of the time Americans spent on social networks.

Games, meanwhile, accounted for more than 10 percent of Internet users' total time online in June, up from 9 percent last year. E-mail, on the other hand, counts for just 8 percent of Americans' Internet time, down from nearly 12 percent last June. That could reflect many Americans contacting friends through Facebook or phone text messages rather than traditional e-mail.

The most popular online games were from Electronic Arts Inc. Its Web games include "Tiger Woods Online" and casual games played on Facebook.

It was not always clear whether a game people played on Facebook counted toward the online games or the social networks category. Zynga's "Farmville," for example, is sometimes hosted on Zynga's servers and sometimes on Facebook's.

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